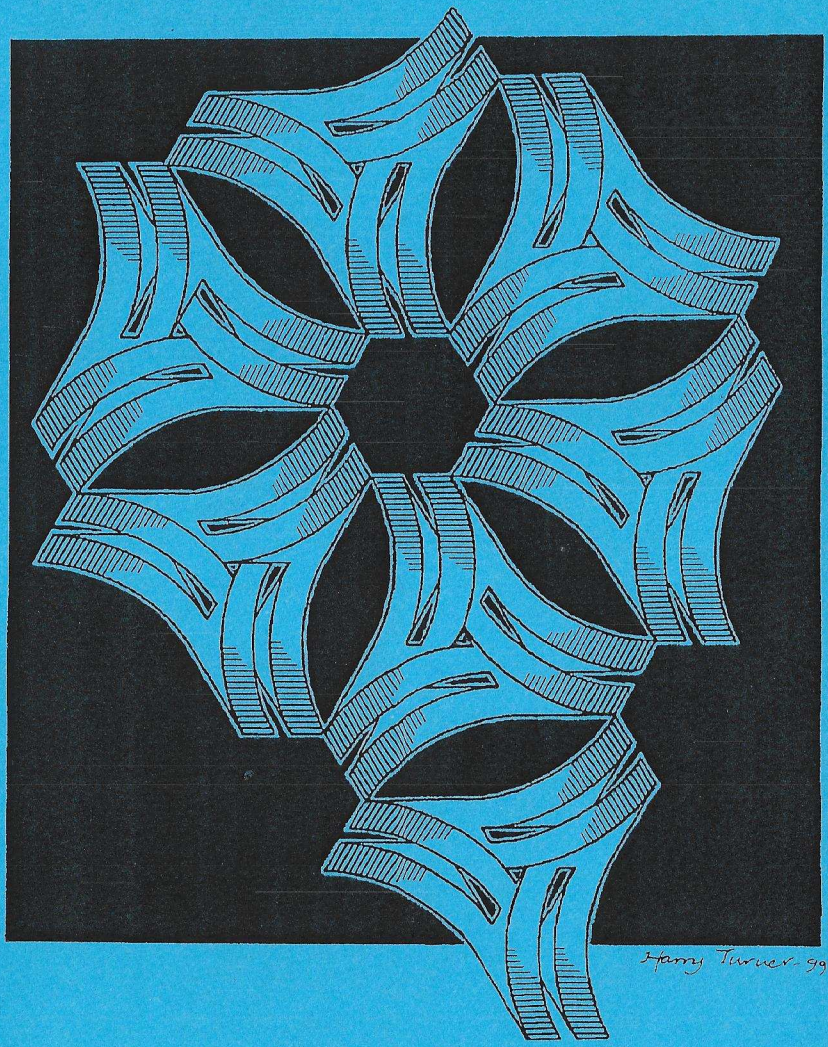
NOVACON 29



Progress Report #3

NOVACON 29

Date: 5th-7th November 1999.

Venue: The Britannia Hotel, New Street, Birmingham.

Guest of Honour: Ian Stewart.

Membership & Enquiries: Attending membership costs £32.00 in advance or £35.00 on the door. Postal registrations should be received by 30th October 1999, after this time please join on the door. Supporting membership costs £15.00 throughout. Cheques/Postal Orders should be made payable to "Novacon 29" and sent with your completed form(s) to: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS. For further information check our web site at http://www.cooky.demon.co.uk/n29/n29.html

Room Rates: £37.50 per person per night for people sharing twin/double rooms and £42.50 pppn for single rooms (inclusive of full English breakfast). NB: Hotel booking forms, and deposits of £20.00 per person, must be received by Carol Morton no later than 16th October 1999. Cheques for room deposits should be made payable to "The Britannia Hotel". Enquires regarding hotel bookings should be sent to Carol at the address above or you can call her on 01384 825386 (before 9pm).

Advertising Rates: Advertising is welcome for both the next two Progress Reports and for the Programme Book. The rates are as follows (fan rates in brackets): Progress Reports - Professional £25.00 (£13.00) full page, £14.50 (£8.00) half page, £8.50 (£5.00) quarter page. Programme Book - Professional £60.00 (£31.00) full page, £32.00 (£15.50) half page, £18.00 (£9.50) quarter page. Anyone interested in advertising should contact Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, (off Clarkes Lane,) Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX (e-mail address empties@breathemail.net). Deadlines for camera-ready advertising copy are detailed below.

Deadlines: Progress Report #4: 4th October 1999, to be mailed mid October 1999. Programme Book: 4th October 1999, distributed at Novacon 29. Novacon 30 Progress Report #1: 14th October 1999, to be distributed at Novacon 29.

Book Room Rates: Tables will cost £15.00 each for the whole weekend. To book a table (or tables) you must be a member of the convention.

Committee: Carol Morton (Chair) and Tony Morton (Treasurer), 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS, (tel: 01384-825386 - before 9pm, e-mail MORTON@CABLENET.CO.UK); Maureen Kincaid Speller (Programme), 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ, England, e-mail novacon@acnestis.demon.co.uk; Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ (tel: 0114 281 1572, e-mail dream@netcomuk.co.uk); Pat McMurray (Hotel Liaison), 28 Plaistow Grove, Bromley, Kent, BR1 3PB e-mail pat@cooky.demon.co.uk); Chris Murphy (Operations), 126 McKean Road, Oldbury, B69 4BA, ((please note new e-mail address chris.murphy@bigfoot.com); Martin Tudor (Publications), 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX (e-mail empties@breathemail.net).

Acknowledgements: Harry Turner for his cover illustration; Tony Berry, Carol Morton and Chris Murphy for their articles, Ian Stewart for his story and Onyx for the information. Uncredited contributions written by Martin Tudor. This Progress Report was printed on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier, contact Martin Tudor at the above address for details of WAVE's competitive prices.

Chair's Piece by Carol Morton

One of the most frustrating things about running a convention is the complaints we get AFTER it has finished when we can't do anything about them.

So if you have a genuine complaint (such as the music being too loud between programme items, or the service of the staff in the hotel, or if your rooms are too cold) then I would ask that you contact a committee member or leave a message at Ops so that my committee and myself can act upon your problem IMMEDIATELY. It doesn't help you, us, or other members of the convention, if we find out about these problems after the convention.

If you don't want to approach a member of the committee, but have a complaint or suggestion, please use the Suggestion Box. This will be on the Registration Desk when it is open, or on the chair outside Ops when registration closes down. I will check this box periodically and anything that I can help with I will. Any appropriate suggestions will be considered and acted upon as well, if not during Novacon 29 then they will be passed on to next year's committee.

By the way any complaints about the décor in the hotel I'm afraid I can't help you with!

So this is Progress Report #3, at the time of writing I am anticipating my imminent departure to Crete, so sun, sea, sand and whatever is on the menu. If you are about to go on your 'jollydays' then have fun and maybe I'll come back if I don't win the lottery.

See you in PR4.

A Bad Spell by Ian Stewart

The Galactic Supercluster Patrol does not officially recognise the existence of magic, for to do so would contravene the strict scientific rationality upon which its very existence is based. From time to time, however, there occurs a case that lacks any coherent scientific explanation.

Such cases are seldom made public.

This is one of them.

In the outer reaches of the Rim Zone orbited the triple worlds of Gog, Magog, and Demagog. Gog was a dead world, scarred by some ancient final battle. Magog and Demagog had sunk into a degenerate and barbarous state.

The former was ruled by the Lords of Ensorcellment led by Archwizard Hocus Pocus; the latter by the Necromantic Guild headed by Archimage Jigri Pokri.

For a substantial fraction of a galactic rotation the two worlds had been at war, but since neither had the technological capacity to attack the other across a million-mile void, the war was confined to propaganda. This was communicated between the worlds by means of their sole physical link - an ancient warp-transducing matter-transmitter originally owned by the postal service and kept open by both sides on the grounds that without it the war could not proceed.

It could transmit nothing larger than a one-foot cube. (Take heed of this crucial fact, O reader.)

Not surprisingly, the conflict had not yet merited the attentions of the Galactic Supercluster Patrol... until rumours began to circulate that the Lords of Ensorcellment were developing a weapon of mass destruction small enough to pass through the mail-warper. The GSP promptly dispatched its most trusted operative, Lance-Menial Ramjit Lightspeed, who was parachuted into the Magoglian capital Slightovand disguised as an apprentice sorcerer of the seventh rung.

The Magoglians were thought to be constructing a bomb, possibly an Antibasher or even a forbidden Sneutron Worldwrecker. But Ramjit's orbiting snoops reported no sign of the necessary hyperduperwhats-itronic collider. They could not even detect an unusual concentration of dungheaps for the production of saltpetre. They did, however, report one unusual item: the Magoglians were building a gigantic earthwork in the form of a five-pointed star. Ramjit was inclined to ignore the report until his computer informed him that such devices were traditionally used to call up demons. He then determined to inspect the site.

After a lengthy and eventful journey involving several long-haired canines, whose details will perhaps be recounted on a more appropriate occasion, he arrived in time to find the structure completed and a ceremony under way. It did not appear likely that it was merely the laying of a foundation-stone - unless the ritual slaughter of a thousand naked virgins was the customary Magoglian way to declare a new building open, which was entirely possible. Enormous torches a thousand feet high burned at each vertex of the pentacle, casting an eerie blue light. Five first-rung thaumaturges in robes flayed from the living body of a thundergoat stood chanting at the inner corners. From a prominent podium the Archwizard conducted the spell-casting:

'By fire and sword and nightbane's gourd
'I spur the call to Asgard's Hall;
'Strike! The rod! Arise! Great God!
'To war! To war!
'I conjure - THOR !!!!!!!! '

There was an enormous thunderclap and a flash of green from horizon to horizon. A gigantic figure materialised, a hundred feet in height, clad in leather and mail with a horned helmet on his mighty brow. Piercing blue eyes blazed from below a shock of corn-gold hair. At his side hung a hammer the size of an artillery-piece. Women swooned. Men gasped with envy.

Ramjit turned to ask a question of his neighbour, to find that all around him were lying gibbering on the ground. He grasped a prone youth and began expertly and tactfully to elicit the information he required: 'Shut your craven face, you worthless son of a snurdworm!'

'Wha-wha-wha-who...'

'Tell me what's going to happen next before I cut off your ears, you lump of skroat's exudations!'

'Bu-bu-bu-bu-bu...'

'The God of War is too large to get through the mail-warper! So what are they going to do about it?'

'Yu-yu-yu-yu...' Ramjit administered a judicious kick. 'Aaaaaaggggh!

The - the Spell of Transient Dwindling!'

Instantly Ramjit grasped the significance. The Lords of Ensorcellment were going to shrink Thor temporarily to one-foot stature, pass him through the warper, and when he automatically returned to his original size - mayhem and destruction would be wreaked on the unwitting citizens of Demagog. Not to mention bloodshed and devastation beyond belief.

It had to be stopped.

A chanting procession was conducting the war-god towards the matter-transmitter. The press of the crowd held Ramjit fast, and he watched ineffectually as the Archwizard prepared the spell. Finding no better way to pass the time, Lightspeed began to invent a plausible excuse for his abject failure.

But then...

Was the anthrax extracted from the wrong species of anth? Was the virginity index less than the recommended 83.4%? Was the bat's blood chilled below normal drinking temperature? Or was the Archwizard merely a bad speller? Lightspeed never did find out. But, to his joy, he perceived that the spell was going awry - for instead of Thor, it was the Archwizard who was dwindling!

Amid a stunned silence, he shrank to the size of a doll, a tin soldier, an ant, a grain of sand, a split sneutron... and vanished.

With a clap of thunder, Thor vanished too, becoming unspellbound as the Archwizard's powers diminished in proportion to his stature. In blind panic the crowd fled, trampling Ramjit in several painful but unvital regions. He rose, painfully, and followed them at a more considered pace.

He had much to think about.

* * *

Afterwards, in a verbal report to the Acting Assistant Supreme Effectuator, Ramjit was able to rationalise his inaction. 'I knew all along

that the spell would not succeed,' the GSP operative stated blandly.

'Why?'

'You can lead a Norse to the warper, but you cannot make him shrink.'

Programme

As you may remember, our Programme organiser is Maureen Kincaid Speller, who having only just returned from her TAFF trip to the USA, has popped over to Australia (joining her partner on part of his GUFF trip).

However, by the time you read this she should be home again and will no doubt be interested in whatever Programme ideas you might have. (As long as they don't feature 'roos, wallabies, Fosters or XXXX!)

Maureen can be contacted at 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ, England or via novacon@acnestis.demon.co.uk.

The Band

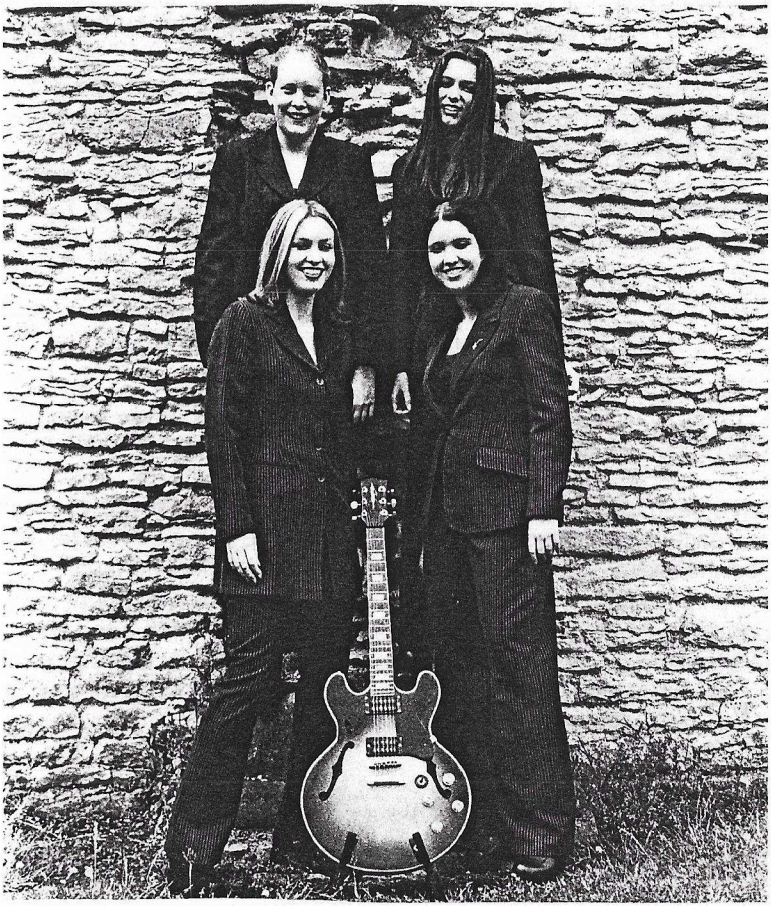
On the Saturday night of Novacon we will be introducing a new band to the sf convention circuit – ONYX.

Onyx have been together for about two years and were previously known as Four Peace Sweet (*ouch*). They are now a five piece all female band, (so the photos below are slightly out of date) with a line up of lead/rhythm/bass guitar, two keyboards and drums. The band play mainly pop/rock music with a strong vocal harmony content. They also perform several numbers in their set cappella. Their set includes covers from the 60's through to the present day popular songs and several original numbers written by them.

In June 1998 they were the winners of the Dudley Rock Festival, as a result of which they were able to record a cd at the Depp International Studios in Birmingham. Since then they have been performing regularly at local clubs in the Midlands area, including the Robin 1 at Merry Hill, the Robin 2 at Bilston and the Shed at Brierley Hill.

They have appeared on television in Midlands Today, in a feature with a group called Black Voices, a well known international cappella group of singers. More recently, in May, they appeared in a half hour programme with the BBC which featured them as an up and coming band.

In March this year they were selected to play at a commercial music convention being held at the NEC Birmingham, over a period of three days as representatives of young local bands. They have future bookings at various venues in the Midlands area including Ronnie Scotts night club in Birmingham.



Operations by Chris Murphy

As we are sure most of you are aware Novacon, like most conventions in Britain, is run by volunteers and we can't have too many of them! So if you are willing to help out at the convention - anything from moving chairs to helping with tech ops or working on the programme, please contact me, Chris Murphy, at 126 McKean Road, Oldbury, B69 4BA, (e-mail chris.murphy@bigfoot.com).

Registration and Operations will be in the same place as last year, first on the left as you come out of the second floor lifts. Unlike last year we shall be operating a ~~fascist~~ 'tidy' Ops Room policy, with designated areas for stuff to be stored and no non-essential furniture (or people). However, you will still be able to leave coats and bags in Ops on request and **at your own risk**.

Hotel Bookings by Carol Morton

If you haven't sent in your Hotel Booking form yet please do so as soon as possible. By the time of reading all forms received will have been passed to the hotel, so you should receive confirmation from them shortly – if you haven't done already.

NB: Despite rumours you may have heard to the contrary ROOMS ARE STILL AVAILABLE IN THE BRITANNIA HOTEL.

As the hotel has insufficient 'comfy' chairs to furnish the two convention bars, we have agreed that they may be removed from the bedrooms for use in these bars.

However, if you feel strongly that you want your 'comfy' chair to remain in your room please let me know as soon as possible. I can be contacted by telephone on 01384-825386 (before 9pm, please) or e-mail MORTON@CABLENET.CO.UK. Failing that you can always write to 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.

The hotel's room rates are £42.50 per person per night in a single room and £37.50 per person per night in a twin or double, both inclusive of full English breakfast. The enclosed hotel booking form explains all this. We also require from you a £20 per person deposit for your rooms. So

please enclose a cheque made payable to "The Britannia Hotel".

The balance of your room costs will have to be paid on arrival at the hotel. Those of you who attended Novacon 28 or have been to the Adelphi in Liverpool for an Eastercon will be accustomed to this as it is standard policy at Britannia Hotels.

The Nova Awards by Tony Berry

The Nova Awards are presented annually at Novacon for work in fanzines. For a piece to qualify for this year's awards, it must be published between 1st October 1998 and 30th September 1999.

Fanzines which have come my way since the last time are:
ANSIBLE #140-146. Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU.
ANTI-BACKUOUS VACLASH #1. Amanda Baker, Bridget Bradshaw and Vicki Rosenzweig, Dept. Physics and Astronomy, PO Box 913, Cardiff University, Wales, CF2 3YB.
BANANA WINGS #13 & 14. Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA and Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Road, Croydon, CR0 6JE.
BARMAID #6 & 7. Yvonne Rowse, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimpley, Worcestershire, DY12 1NP.
FABLES OF IRISH FANDOM Vol. 4 & 5. John Berry, 4 Chilterns, South Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 8JU and Ken Cheslin, 29 Kestrel Road, Halesowen, West Midlands, B63 2PH.
OLAF #3. Ken Cheslin (address above).
PARAKEET #1-3. Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer (addresses above).
PLOKTA Vol. 4 No. 2. Steve Davies, Alison Scott and Mike Scott, 52 Westbourne Terrace, Reading, Berks., RG30 2RP.

All of the above fanzines are available for "The Usual", which means in exchange for other fanzines, contributions, or in response to letters of comment. In the first instance a polite letter of request accompanied by postage or a large stamped, self-addressed envelope, works fine.

[If you have any enquiries about the Novas or you want a copy of the Rules (50p to cover copying and postage), contact Tony Berry at 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 4EP.]

Have You Any Room?

We are looking for a new home for the Novacon art boards. If you have a spare room, garage or shed and think you can help please contact Tony Morton on 01384-825386 (before 9pm, please) or e-mail MORTON@CABLENET.CO.UK. Failing that you can always write to 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.

Novacon can arrange delivery immediately after this Novacon and will collect and return the boards for and after each subsequent Novacon. (One bonus of this is that if you have any gear you need to transport to and from Novacons the Novacon van can do this at the same time – and give you a lift as well!)

Novacon's RNIB Raffle

As usual we will be selling raffle tickets to raise money for the Royal National Institute for the Blind's "Talking Books for the Blind Project". Last year the raffle raised just over £360 (which we rounded-up to £400), but this year we would like to make that £500.

So, if you have anything you would like to donate as a prize for the raffle please contact Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (e-mail empties@breathemail.net).

Child Minding

At the last few Novacons Richard Standage and Helena Bowles have offered an informal child minding service at the convention. However because this facility has not been used for the last couple of years we are not able to offer it this year. As ever, feedback is invited to Carol Morton, Novacon 29 Chair, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS or via e-mail MORTON@CABLENET.CO.UK.

Novacon 29 Members from 30th March to 11th September 1999

130 Marcus Rowland
131 Sabine Furlong
132 Nigel Furlong
133 Tony Berry
134 Dave Lally
135 Lynn Edwards
136 Sue Dawson
137 Guy Dawson
138 Gary Wilkinson
139 Dave Hicks
140 Cat Coast
141 David Laight
142 SMS
143 Christina Lake
144 Doug Bell
145 Caroline Loveridge
146 Gavin Long
147 Bridget Wilkinson
148 Jill Bradley
149 Phil Bradley
150 Chris Baker
151 Rachel Baker
152 Jackie E. Burns
153 Terry Twine
154 Ken Macleod
155 John Dallman
156 Jack Cohen
157 Carol Murtha Irving
158 John Harvey
159 Eve Harvey
160 Mike Damesick
161 Urban Gunnarsson
162 David Roy Upton
163 Victoria Amanda Upton
164 Hanna Worrall
165 Chris Dunk
166 M. Helen Hall
167 David Peak
168 Susan Peak
169 Norman Clinton
170 Lena Sarah
171 Richard Kennaway
172 Mike Moir
173 Debby Moir
174 Neil Summerfield
175 Huw Walters
176 Billy Stirling
177 Jim Barker
178 Pat McGowan
179 Phil Nanson
180 Kari Maund
181 David Cochrane
182 Paul Treadaway
183 Peter Day
184 Sue Mason
185 Dick Jude
186 Andy Rice
187 Matt Kiessling
188 Mary Ann Hollingsworth
189 Ken Cheslin
190 Vincent Docherty
191 Fay Symes
192 David Symes
193 Marsha Jones
194 Lee Lawrence
195 Sue Edwards
196 Alex McLintock
197 Mark Waller
198 Austin Benson
199 Caroline Wilson
200 Debbi Kerr
201 Jean Maudsley
202 Andy Sawyer
203 Peter Redfarn
204 Wayne King